

## Wild World adopts pool precautions after drowning

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# Wild World adopts pool precautions after drowning

**By Frank P. L. Somerville**

Several safety precautions have been put into effect at a Largo amusement park since a 9-year-old boy drowned in its surf-simulating pool last Wednesday, state and Prince Georges county inspectors said yesterday.

Dr. Helen McAllister, the county's health officer, said after a meeting yesterday at Wild World that her staff, representatives of the company operating the park's popular "Wild

Wave" pool and the state Department of Licensing and Regulation agreed to consider further precautions after experience with the changes already adopted.

"What we learned is that this is a combination of 'ride' and 'pool' and therefore not governed by specific statutes or regulations," Dr. McAllister said. "We're breaking new ground."

Among the changes agreed to were a reduction in the number of rafts allowed in the pool from 1,500 to 700, a

limit of two persons to a raft, and the closing of the facility for 15 minutes every hour to permit swimmers and lifeguards to rest.

In addition, 600 floating vests are on order and will be made available free to any pool users who want them. New railings had been planned before last week's accident to force swimmers to enter the pool in orderly queues.

The drowning of Christie Davis, of Anderson, S.C., was the first such reported incident since the Wild Wave

pool opened to the public May 30. One other child is known to have drowned at a similar amusement facility last summer in Vernon, N.J.

Daniel Dudley, Maryland supervisor of amusement rides, who was one of the 10 health, safety and amusement park officials at yesterday's meeting, said he would need another week to complete his report on the accident. He said he had interviewed a number of people who were present during the incident but had not yet

talked to members of the victim's family.

Wild World's operations manager, who also attended the meeting, was unavailable for comment.

Christie Davis, described by his family as healthy and able to swim, had been visiting an aunt who lives in the District of Columbia. He was taken to the Wild World park last Wednesday by a 37-year-old cousin.

Eyewitness accounts differed over whether the turbine engines that cre-

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ate surf-like waves in the acre-sized pool had been turned off at the time Christie slipped from an inflated raft into water about 4 feet deep.

Witnesses also disagreed over whether the child was moving after being brought out of the water and whether resuscitation efforts had seemed to revive him briefly.

The accident happened about 5:30 p.m. after the child had been playing in the water for two hours, Mr. Dudley was told. Christie was pronounced dead at Prince George's General Hospital in Cheverly at 6:40 p.m.

Mr. Dudley said he was prepared to accept the account of the lifeguards and other park employees who reported that the wave machine had been turned off before the drowning. Lifeguards turned it off so they could assist a woman in another part of the pool suffering from exhaustion, he said.

The state's medical examiner has ruled that the boy's death was from "accidental drowning," although it

will be several weeks before the results of all routine autopsy tests are known.

Dr. McAllister said she and her staff decided during yesterday's meeting that the Wild Wave pool presented three possible health problems:

- Fatigue caused by the pool's "very strong" waves.

- The large number of rafts and people in the pool at one time, although she added that the 10 lifeguards on duty fully met the county's standards.

- The part of the pool "where the artificial surf is breaking" needs closer attention from lifeguards than even the deepest water, where there are "swells." The pool ranges in depth from 0 to 8 feet.

"This is the kind of 'ride' that requires parents or other adults to be very attentive, and not just drop their kids off and leave them," Dr. McAllister said. "We felt the Wild World people were being tremendously cooperative," she added.